

Reactions of Children to Disaster

Pre-Adolescent/Adolescent (12-18)

Common responses in this age group are:

- ◆ Trouble with sleep and/or appetite
- ◆ Rebelling at home and/or refusing to do chores
- ◆ School problems (such as fighting, withdrawal, loss of interest, attention-seeking behavior)
- ◆ Physical problems (such as headaches and tension, vague aches and pains, rashes, bowel problems)
- ◆ Loss of interest in social activities with youngsters their own age
- ◆ Increase or decrease in their energy level
- ◆ Irresponsibility and/or delinquent behavior

Reactions are especially noteworthy in this age group. They need to feel that their fears are both appropriate and shared by others. Adult help should be focused on decreasing tension, anxieties and guilt feelings.

Some ways adults may help:

- ◆ Get back to normal routines
- ◆ Talk about the disaster and plan what to do in future disasters
- ◆ Ease up on school and home expectations (for a while)
- ◆ Give extra individual attention
- ◆ Encourage participation in the community rehabilitation work.
- ◆ Encourage involvement in regular social activities, athletics, clubs, etc.

Consider professional mental health services for children whose responses to the disaster are getting in the way of regular home and school life.



Although people of all ages share many feelings and reactions after a disaster, children need special attention.

Typical reactions for children of all ages:

- ◆ Fear of future disasters
- ◆ Behaviors they might have shown at an earlier age
- ◆ Trouble sleeping
- ◆ Fear of events associated with the disaster
- ◆ Fear of being left by loved ones

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